

Your MORNING BASKET

HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR HOMESCHOOL
ONE MORNING AT A TIME



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WITH CINDY ROLLINS

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All Scripture references from the *New American Bible*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005

All web links and resources mentioned in this book can be found at

edsnapshots.com/morningtimeresources.

For my Scholé Sisters — the ones far and the ones near.

I couldn't do this homeschool thing without you.

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A NOTE FROM CINDY

While reading Pam's book on Morning Time, it occurred to me that I do not have nine children, I have ten. And I don't mean my husband, even though he is quite nervous that with no more children to homeschool I will commence teaching him. No, I feel that my tenth child, the darling I anxiously watch from afar to see how it flourishes, is Morning Time.

To see the idea of Morning Time slowly take root over many long years and finally to reproduce itself in a new generation is astounding to me.

To say that I created Morning Time because we participated in it for so many years is like saying I created breakfast because we had oatmeal every day. Still it is a much-loved adopted child, and to see it thrive in old and new ways is gratifying. I think this is happening now, after so many years, just because it is so organic, so natural. If you are in the business of ordering affections (*ordo amoris*) then Morning Time is the most obvious, if not the easiest, way to go.

Twenty-seven years ago Timothy (my oldest) and I repeated his Awana verse, sang a Bible song, read nursery rhymes, and read aloud all morning long just because it was so much fun. Then we got up the next day and did it again. We never did stop.

This past school year was our last official year of Morning Time. Andrew and Alex and I got up many mornings, prayed together, read poems, diagrammed sentences, then read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* together. It was a fitting way to end a quarter century of family tradition.

Only it is not the end. If Pam is right and we are not merely teachers but fellow travelers, then it makes sense that Morning Time will continue for me. I will still get up and seek the Lord in His Word, sing His praises, and commence praying for my husband, my nine children, their four spouses, and my ten grandchildren. Many days

I will read a poem and most days I will read a few chapters from a few books. Turns out Morning Time might have just been an excuse for me to learn after all. Nothing has changed except that no toddler interrupts me these days, except when the grandchildren are visiting. This week two little girls have kept me from my devotions but not from participating in a liturgy of love. As I sat reading aloud to them from the book my grandmother read aloud to me, I couldn't help but get choked up. Love is a liturgy. It means something. I must tell someone.

People used to ask me to write a book about Morning Time. For a while I thought maybe I would, but then I didn't, and life got complicated. Then one day I looked up and I was not the only one. The burden was lifted. Other women — writers, mothers, teachers — were writing and living out their own Morning Times. Sarah MacKenzie breathed new life into my posts and now Pam has written this helpful book. And helpful it is. It even made me a little sad that I couldn't do it all over again. However, Pam's reminder that I am still a learner encouraged me.

Pam has said so much that I would say and then some. I love reading about Morning Time from her fresh perspective. So much of her experience is common to my family. Once upon a time I had three little children and we had Morning Time just like Pam! Then there were nine, and then eight, and then seven, and so on just like an Agatha Christie mystery. And now suddenly, so suddenly, just two are left at home but going on to other schools of life. Yet Morning Time lives on in my life, in Pam's family, and maybe in your family too. That brings me great joy. "I have no greater joy than to hear my children walk in the truth." (1 John 1:4)

Thanks, Pam, for reminding me of the fun I had with my children once upon a time. May the fruit last long after you and I are gone.

Cindy Rollins
Summer 2015

INTRODUCTION

Looking back, I can't quite remember how I stumbled into this Morning Time thing. There are blog posts on my own site that make vague references from a few years ago but tell no story of origin. If I know me, though, I found it online. I probably stumbled across Cindy's Morning Time Moms blog by following a rabbit trail of links from blog to blog. Very likely a blogger quoted something wise she had said — Cindy is like that — and I followed a link and became interested in *everything* she had to say.

I do know we started Morning Time slowly, probably with prayer and poetry, and then adding a bit of reading aloud and a few other small practices. Through the years it has developed into this beautiful, rich practice that we look forward to each morning, but even our small beginnings were a blessing to our school day.

Mornings have always been a tough time for me. I have trouble getting motivated to begin the day. I got intentional about making mornings better last summer and finally came up with a plan that worked well for me as a homeschool mom (when I follow it — ahem). Since you always write the book you need to read, I sat down this past winter and started drafting a book about how to have a productive homeschool morning. Planning a Morning Time was going to be one piece of that book, but as I wrote, outlined, and wrote some more, it became apparent to me that the book inside me was really just about Morning Time.

Talking to homeschoolers through the blog, on social media, at conferences, and at conventions, I realized that people were looking for a comprehensive Morning Time resource — something that would help them unpack the practice, understand the pieces, and put it into action. Once I had Cindy's blessing, the plans for this guide and the Your Morning Basket podcast took over all of my working hours.

My goal is to give you something extremely helpful — something that might introduce you to ideas you haven't given much thought to, a place to begin an exploration of principles you hadn't considered before, and a practical handbook to take you from the principles to "what do I do with all of this on Monday morning." If you start with the practices, you will be blessed even while you learn the principles. If you have a firm grasp of the principles, now is the time to put them into action. Principles and practice are a bit like the chicken and the egg. It really doesn't matter which comes first. Nurture the one you have and soon you will be blessed with endless fried chicken and all will be right with the world.

I have been immensely blessed by writing this guide. Doing this work has caused me to stop, ponder, and even change things about how I was doing my own Morning Time. It has caused me to be thoughtful, reorganize, and understand better why this practice is the best thing I can give my children. I hope it does the same for you.



MODULE 1

WHAT IS MORNING TIME?

QUITE SIMPLY, MORNING TIME IS MADE UP OF SUBJECTS THAT THE FAMILY CAN DO TOGETHER THAT EMPHASIZE TRUTH, GOODNESS, AND BEAUTY IN THEIR HOMESCHOOL.



Like so many others, most of my days begin with a cup of coffee.

Without even consciously thinking about my actions, I shuffle to the kitchen immediately after rising, push a button, and impatiently bask

in the dim glow of blue and red lights while the machine warms the water. I like to take slow sips as I sit in silence — pondering my day, reading a brief devotion, being alone with my thoughts. On the days when I begin with these moments, I am most ready to meet whatever busyness or challenges the morning brings. On the other hand, when I am awakened by pouncing, demanding children, it is much more difficult to orient myself to a joyful morning routine. The habit of a warm drink and a few moments of contemplation creates in me a disposition for a very good day. Children also need to get their days off to a good start. A hug in the morning and a warm breakfast both help, but there is another important way we can ease our children into a good school day. Morning Time is the way we can give our children a disposition for learning.

Morning Meeting, Circle Time, Morning Basket — these terms are often used interchangeably for the homeschooling practice known as Morning Time. But not all practices called by these names are Morning Time as unfolded here. Preschool, daycare, and early elementary school Circle Times often include utilitarian practices such as completing a calendar, checking the daily weather, children's songs, and picture books. While some of those elements might be incorporated into a homeschool Morning Time, they do not make a complete Morning Time. We want to include in our Morning Time routine richer practices filled with meaning and purpose. Before picking and choosing what we will do in our particular Morning Times, let us take a look at the origins and characteristics of Morning Time, developing a concise picture of what it is.

Morning Time is the brainchild of Cindy Rollins. For over 27 years her family has started each day gathered around mom while reading, singing, discussing and living

what became known as Morning Time. Cindy has a blog archive at [Morning Time Moms](#) which provides information about her Morning Time as well as an audio lecture on the practice available from the Circe Institute titled “[The Long Haul: On Morning Time.](#)” Once Cindy began writing and speaking about the practice, it became popular among Classical and Charlotte Mason homeschoolers as they recognized the value in spending time each day reading aloud from living books and learning in community as a family. Most recently, Morning Time has gained more widespread popularity in the homeschooling community with its inclusion in Sarah Mackenzie’s book as a key strategy for [Teaching from Rest](#).

Quite simply, Morning Time is made up of subjects that the family can do together that emphasize truth, goodness, and beauty in their homeschool. While Morning Time will look slightly different in every family, there are some characteristics that are common across most Morning Times. I call them the 3 Rs.

RITUAL

One of the primary characteristics of Morning Time is the inclusion of ritual. Ritual elevates mundane, ordinary activities into something that has meaning beyond the sum total of those activities. Why does this matter? After all, aren’t we just teaching history and science? No, we are teaching persons. We are striving to help our children become life-long seekers of knowledge by building habits and virtue. Thus, education needs to be more than a means to an end. Instead, it is a valuable thing in itself, a thing worth doing. Education is a vital practice we want to weave into our entire lives. Morning Time allows us to start our days making knowledge and ideas the basis of all our educational efforts, giving ideas an almost reverent priority.

If your house is anything like mine, there isn’t much reverence —potty humor and couch Olympics are likely to break out at any time. This is the very reason why

adding ritual to Morning Time is important. And it's easily done, too. The consistent daily habit of Morning Time itself is a ritual. Simply by getting up and doing it day in and day out you are emphasizing the importance of education. Some families will begin each Morning Time with prayer, singing, or the reading of a Psalm. Each morning session could also begin by lighting a candle or the reciting of a favorite family poem. I begin and end our Morning Time each day with the words of Christ, "Peace be with you." To which my children respond, "And with your spirit." We are reminded of the peace of Christ and that we are to share it with each other throughout the day. This simple practice adds meaning through ritual to our morning.

READING

The heart of Morning Time is what you choose to read aloud to your children. These choices will differ from family to family but will characteristically include the best stories from children's and classic literature. While each family member may have their own reading at other times of day, reading during Morning Time is done in community, which leads to the opportunity for shared discussion. Choose selections that will appeal to the age-range of your children. If you have mostly younger children, then quality picture books (both fiction and non-fiction), a story Bible written in beautiful language, fairy tales, science reading, and Shakespeare retellings are wonderful choices. Older elementary children and teens should experience Scripture from your preferred translation and Shakespeare from the original. Don't worry. They can and do understand it.

If you have a wide age range, then read books aimed towards the older children first while everyone is fresh and attention is high. Little ones can play (hopefully — this takes some training depending on their ages) with toys while you read. Later in morning time the older children can be dismissed to complete independent work

and you can take the little ones aside to enjoy stories that will appeal more to them. The beauty of this family reading program is that with practice the entire family, from oldest to youngest, will grow in appreciation of beautiful stories and language. It never ceases to amaze my husband that all three of my children yell, “Ooo Shakespeare!” as if they are greeting a long-lost friend whenever his name is mentioned.

RECITATION

The final common characteristic of Morning Time is the inclusion of recitation or memorization. Because our character is shaped by the words we hide within our heart, recitation is a valuable method of education in the homeschool. As with every other Morning Time practice, families will approach memory work differently. Scripture, poetry, prayers (in English and Latin), and Shakespeare are all worthy additions to a Morning Time recitation list.

Some families will choose to memorize more while others may limit themselves to Scripture or poetry. Some families will add practical tidbits such as a history timeline and math facts to this list. For ideas about what to memorize, the list of [100 Things for Kids to Memorize](#) from my blog [edsnapshots.com](#) will get you started. While memorization can be as simple as shared reciting while reading, you can also [add techniques](#) to your Morning Time practices to aid in memory work.

RELATIONSHIP

These 3 Rs are the methods we use to build our Morning Time, but the main idea behind the practices is relationship. Morning Time is about the ideas and discussion we share, coming together as a family with Mom modeling lifelong learning for her children, building a common family culture that continues to connect us long after our homeschool days are over. Cindy has said that Morning Time is for the long haul

— equipping our children with ideas they will have available to them long into the future. The habits we build, the material we recite together, the common canon of stories and ideas shape us, both together and apart.

While it is easy to outline the means to a successful Morning Time — and I know you might be tempted to skip ahead to see exactly how

to do it — it is worth a moment of our time to justify the ends of this practice. If we are devoting an hour or more of our school day to learning in this fashion, then it is important to know why we are doing it so we don't lose heart midyear.

